

Hill Panel Turns To Top Issue, Verifying SALT

By Vernon A. Guidry Jr.
Washington Star Staff Writer

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee today turned to the most sensitive, technical and perhaps most difficult single question of the strategic arms treaty debate: Can the United States adequately determine whether the Russians are cheating?

Today's open session follows an afternoon spent by the committee behind the Capitol's most secure doors going over this question of verification, as it is called in arms control jargon.

Scheduled to testify were Defense Secretary Harold Brown, CIA Director Stanfield Turner and George Seignious, director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

The administration has maintained that the SALT II treaty is "adequately verifiable," despite such recent setbacks as the loss of CIA electronic listening posts in Iran that monitored test launches of Soviet liquid-fueled rockets.

Chief among critics on verification has been Sen. John Glenn, D-Ohio, a former astronaut sufficiently at home with the technology to command credibility on the issue with colleagues.

At a recent committee meeting, Glenn made clear that he is still very skeptical about the verification ability of the United States and is particularly interested in pinning the administration down on current capabilities, rather than being satisfied with programs for future improvement.

The administration position in that regard has been that while U.S.

ability to monitor missile tests was degraded by the loss of Iran, its capabilities remain good enough to detect Soviet cheating before it could affect the strategic balance.

For the first time yesterday, the administration picked up endorsements for the treaty from retired high-ranking military men: Adm. Noel Gaylor, former head of the National Security Agency, Gen. Russell Dougherty, former chief of the Strategic Air Command, and Adm. Isaac C. Kidd, former commander of the Navy's Atlantic fleet and former chief of naval materiel.

Kidd said the treaty supplied breathing room in which to correct deficiencies in the strategic position of the United States.

Gaylor said more could be hoped for, "but I ask what the situation would be without this treaty." Dougherty commended the process of negotiation and the results of SALT II.